

Novæ et Vetera.

MODERN FAITH HEALING.

F. ANTON MESMER.

AMONG those who have applied to the healing of disease the latent and ill-defined force which, for want of a better term is known as suggestion, a conspicuous place is occupied by Anton Mesmer. Unlike Valentine Greatrakes and Gassner, who came like shadows and so departed, Mesmer's stamp has left a lasting impression on the history of medicine. This is partly no doubt because he had been duly admitted in *nostro docto corpore*, but it is mainly to be attributed to the fact that he made his appearance in Paris at a time when the reaction of credulity against the rationalist doctrines of the encyclopaedists had reached its highest pitch, when religion had been destroyed, and its place had been taken by superstition. Moreover, Mesmer was an Austrian, and as such was regarded with interest, if not with sympathy, by Marie Antoinette. To her influence it may be conjectured were due his vogue in the French capital, and the offers made to him at one time by the Government.

Though Mesmer did not discover the force which he called "animal magnetism," and which has been variously called "Mesmerism," "Braidism," and "Hypnotism," he certainly succeeded in directing to it closer and more general attention than it had ever received before. Since there can be no doubt that the application of "animal magnetism" as practised by him required as a condition of its operation full belief, or at any rate a state of animated expectancy, in the patient, he deserves a place in the series of modern faith healers.

There appears to be some doubt both as to the date and the place of Mesmer's birth. According to some he made his first appearance on what Lear calls "this great stage of fools"—Lear's description of the world has a peculiar appropriateness in connexion with faith-healing—on May 23rd, 1733, at Meersburg; according to others at Weil, near Lake Constance; others, again, say that he first saw the light in Suabia, in 1734; whilst another authority states that he was born at Vienna in 1740. He studied medicine at the University of Vienna, among his teachers being Van Swieten and de Haen. He had been interested in astrology, and when he took his doctor's degree in 1766, the title of his thesis was *De Planetarum Influxu*. In it he contended that, in accordance with the known principles of attraction between the heavenly bodies, these spheres also exercise a direct action on all the constituent parts of living bodies, particularly on the nervous system, through the medium of a fluid which penetrates everything.¹

He says that he determined this action by the *intension* and *remission* of the properties of matter and organized bodies such as gravity, cohesion, elasticity, irritability, electricity. He maintained that just as the tides are produced by the alternating effects of gravitation, so the intension and remission of the properties above enumerated occasion in living bodies alternating effects analogous to those seen in the sea. By these considerations he claimed to have proved that the animal body, being subjected to the same action, was also subject to a kind of flux and reflux. He called the property of the animal body which makes it susceptible to the action of the heavenly bodies and of the earth "animal magnetism." By this magnetism also he explains the monthly periods in women, and generally the remissions and intermissions seen in disease.

It should be said here that Mesmer's medical equipment was regarded by those who knew him as slender, while

experts thought him ignorant of science. In a word, Mesmer knew little of physic and still less of physics. It is not surprising, therefore, that his efforts to secure recognition of his "discoveries" from the leaders of the medical profession in Vienna were in vain; nor was he more successful with the scientific societies either of Vienna, Paris, London, and Berlin. The Académie des Sciences of Paris and the Royal Society of London more or less politely indicated that they considered him a visionary. Notwithstanding this cold reception, Mesmer proceeded to treat diseases by his methods and to claim cures by magnetism. He seems to have got the idea from Father Hell, Astronomer to the Emperor. It is certain that Hell furnished him with specially prepared magnets which he himself had used in the treatment of diseases, and when Mesmer began to use the same method he was naturally accused by Hell of stealing his thunder. An unedifying controversy followed, the end of which was that Mesmer professed to cure not by magnets but by "animal magnetism."

We think the best way to enable the reader to judge for himself how much credit is to be attached to Mesmer's account of his "cures" will be to quote some examples of them as reported by himself. The following is his account of one of the cases on which he strove to base his doctrine:²

Case of Miss Oesterline.

It was especially in the years 1773 and 1774 that I undertook

at my house the treatment of an unmarried lady, aged 29, named Oesterline. Attacked several years before by a convulsive disease, the most troublesome symptoms of which were that the blood rushed with impetuosity to the head, and excited in that part agonizing pain in the teeth and ears, which were followed by delirium, maniacal elation, vomiting, and syncope. This was for me a most favourable opportunity of observing exactly the kind of flux and reflux which animal magnetism causes in the human body. The patient often had salutary crises and a remarkable relief was the result; but this was but momentary and always imperfect. The wish to discover the cause of this imperfection and my uninterrupted observations led me gradually to the point of recognizing the operation of Nature and of attaining to a sufficient understanding of it to foresee and predict without uncertainty the different revolutions of the disease. Encouraged by this first success, I was no longer doubtful as to the possibility of bringing it to perfection; if I could succeed in discover-

covering that there existed between the bodies that make up our globe a reciprocal action like to that of the Heavenly bodies by means of which I should be able to imitate artificially the periodical revolutions of flux and reflux of which I have spoken.

I had the usual knowledge about the magnet—its action on iron, and the readiness of our humours to combine with that mineral, and the various attempts made with it in France, Germany, and England in the treatment of diseases of the stomach and toothache were known to me. These reasons, together with the analogy of the properties of that substance with the general system, made me regard it as the most suitable for this kind of experiment. To assure myself of the success of the experiment I prepared the patient in an interval between the attacks by a continuous administration of iron preparations. The patient having felt, on July 28th, 1774, a renewal of her usual attacks, I applied to the stomach and the two legs three magnets. There resulted shortly afterwards extraordinary sensations; she felt internally painful currents of a subtle substance, which after different attempts to find their way, directed themselves towards the lower part and caused a cessation of all the symptoms during six hours.³ The condition of the patient



FIG. 1.—FRIEDRICH ANTON MESMER.

² Op. cit., p. 12.

³ In a letter to Dr. Ungen he gives a more detailed description of the effects of the magnets. "She at once felt a burning tearing pain which rose from the feet to the iliac crests where it joined a similar pain which came down on one side from the place where the magnet was attached to the breast and went up on the other to the head, ending at the crown. This pain, as it ceased, left in all the joints a burning heat like fire. This magnetic vapour seems sometimes to break in different places, sometimes to join itself with impetuosity. The patient and those about her were frightened by this phenomenon and expressed the opinion that the experiment should cease. I insisted, however, and I applied still other magnets to the lower parts. Then she felt come down with impetuosity the pains which had affected the upper part. This transference of pain lasted the whole night, and was accompanied by an abundant sweat of the paralysed side at the time of the previous fit. Finally, all the symptoms ceased little by little, and the patient having become insensible to the action

¹ *Mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal*. Par M. Mesmer, Docteur en Médecine de la Faculté de Vienne. A Genève, et se trouve à Paris, chez P. Fr. Didot le jeune, Libraire. Imprimeur de Monsieur quai des Augustins. 1779.

on the next day, having placed me in a position to renew the same experiment I was equally successful. My observation of these effects . . . threw a new light on the matter; in confirming my previous ideas as to the influence of the general agent it taught me that another principle caused the magnet, incapable by itself of doing so, to act on the nerves, and made me see that I had only some steps to take to arrive at the *imitative theory* which was the object of my research.

Further on he says:

Miss Oesterline had a fright and a chill, which caused a sudden suppression; she fell back into her former convulsions. I invited Dr. Ingenhoulze⁴ to come to my house. He came, accompanied by a young doctor: the patient was then in a state of syncope with convulsions.



FIG. 2.—THE MAGNETISER.

I made him go near the patient whilst I went apart, telling him to touch her. She made no movement. I called him to me and communicated to him animal magnetism by holding his hands. I then made him go back to the patient, myself still keeping apart, and told him to touch her a second time. Thereupon convulsive movements came on. I made him repeat several times this touching, which he did with the end of his finger, of which he each time varied the direction, and always, to his great surprise, he caused a convulsive effect in the part which he touched. This operation over, he told me that he was convinced. I proposed a second experiment. We went away from the patient, so that we could not be seen by her even had she been conscious. I offered M. Ingenhoulze six porcelain cups and asked him to indicate the one to which he wished I should communicate the magnetic virtue. I touched the one chosen by him; I then had the six cups successively applied to the patient's hand; when we came to that one which I had touched the hand made a movement and showed signs of feeling pain. M. Ingenhoulze, having applied the six cups, got the same effect. I then had the cups taken back to the place from which they had been taken, and after a certain time, holding him by the hand, I told him to touch with the other whichever of the cups he wished. This he did. On these cups being brought near the patient . . . the same effect followed.

I proposed to him a third experiment to make him see its action [that of magnetism] at a distance, and its penetrating virtue. I directed my finger towards the patient at a distance of eight paces: a moment later her body was in convulsions to such a degree as to raise her upon her bed with manifestations of pain; I continued in the same position to direct my finger towards the patient, placing M. Ingenhoulze between her and myself. She had the same sensations. These experiments having been repeated at the desire of M. Ingenhoulze, I asked him if he was satisfied, offering, if he were not, to repeat our procedures. His answer was that he wished for nothing more, and that he was convinced. . . . We separated. I went near the patient to continue my treatment; it had the happiest result. I succeeded the same day in re-establishing the ordinary course of nature, and in stopping by that means all the symptoms caused by the suppression. Two days later I learnt with amazement that M. Ingenhoulze said things in public altogether the opposite of what he had said to me; that he denied the success of the various experiments which he had witnessed.

Mesmer adds that he was about to make a complaint about this when the lady, learning of the conduct of M. Ingenhoulze, was so hurt at being compromised in such

of the magnet was cured of that attack. She has since had several relapses which were cured easily and promptly. I attribute these relapses to her extreme weakness and to the duration of the disease. I advise her to carry constantly some magnets, and since that time she has regained her health and is well."

⁴This physician is described by Mesmer as an inoculator at Vienna. In Baron's *Life of Jenner* will be found a correspondence between Jenner and Ingenhoulze on the subject of vaccination. He was prominent as a man of science, and was a Fellow of our Royal Society.

a way that she fell back into her former state, aggravated by a nervous fever. Her condition required all his attention during fifteen days. He goes on: "It was in these circumstances that, continuing my researches, I was fortunate enough to overcome the difficulties which stood in my way, and to give to my theory the perfection I wished. The cure of this lady was its first fruit, and I have had the satisfaction of seeing her since that time enjoy good health, get married, and bear children."

Further on he speaks of striking cures wrought in Suabia and in hospitals under the eyes of the physicians of Berne and Zurich. These, he says, left them convinced of the existence of animal magnetism and the usefulness of his theory.

Mesmer and Gassner.

Here comes a reference to Johann Joseph Gassner, a faith-healer of whom an account appeared in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL of January 15th, 1910, which we think it well to quote, as Mesmer's cures were compared to those of Gassner by several of his contemporaries, and it is stated by some that it was the observation of Gassner's "cures" that convinced him that the use of magnets was unnecessary:

It was from the year 1774 to that of 1775 that an ecclesiastic, a man of good faith, but of excessive zeal, wrought in the diocese of Ratisbon, on different patients of the nervous class, effects which appeared to be supernatural. . . . His reputation spread to Vienna. . . . My experience, had already taught me that this man was in this matter only the instrument of Nature. It was only because his profession, with the help of chance, determined in him certain natural combinations that he renewed the periodical symptoms of the diseases without knowing the cause of them. The termination of these paroxysms was regarded as being real cures; time alone could disabuse the public.

The Case of Miss Paradis.

Returning to Vienna, Mesmer undertook, among other patients, the case of Miss Paradis, aged 18 years, who had been absolutely blind since the age of 4.

It was a perfect *gutta serena* with convulsive movements of the eyes. She was, moreover, the subject of melancholia, accompanied by obstructions of the spleen and liver, which often threw her into fits of delirium and mania sufficient to produce the impression that she was absolutely mad. I next undertook the case of a girl named Zwelferine, aged 19 years, who had been blind since the age of 2 owing to a *gutta serena* accompanied by a wrinkled and very thick opacity of the cornea with atrophy of the globe. She was, moreover, subject to periodical spitting of blood. I had this girl from the Orphanage at Vienna. Her blindness was attested by the directors. . . .



FIG. 3.

The father and mother of Miss Paradis, witnesses of her cure . . . busily spread the news abroad and their satisfaction at the result. . . . The two presidents of the Faculty at the head of a deputation of that body . . . came to my house, and having examined the young lady loudly added their testimony to that of the public. Dr. von Störck, one of these gentlemen, who was particularly acquainted with the young person, having treated her for ten years without any success, expressed to me his satisfaction at so interesting a cure.

Among the doctors who came to satisfy their curiosity, says Mesmer, was Dr. Barth, Professor of Ophthalmology, and an operator for cataract. He had even recognized twice that Miss Paradis enjoyed the power of vision. But

adds Mesmer, Barth, carried away by envy, boldly spread about among the public that the young lady did not see, and that he had assured himself of the fact. Mesmer continues:

It was in vain that the public repeated to him that a thousand witnesses deposed in favour of the cure; he alone maintaining to the contrary, associated himself in this with M. Ingenhoulze, the inoculator of whom I have spoken. These two persons . . . conspired to remove Miss Paradis from my care, in the state of imperfection in which her eyes still were. . . . With this object endeavours were made to excite M. Paradis by the fear that pension of his daughter would be withdrawn, together with many other advantages which were set forth to him. In consequence he claimed his daughter. She, together with her mother, expressed her unwillingness and the fear that her cure would be imperfect. Her withdrawal was insisted upon, and this disappointment, by renewing her convulsions, occasioned a troublesome relapse. This, however, had no consequence as regards her eyes: she continued to improve in the use of them. The father, seeing that she was better . . . again demanded his daughter and forced his wife to insist upon it. . . . The girl resisted; . . . the mother, who up to that time . . . had begged me to excuse the extravagances of her husband, came on April 29th to intimate to me that she intended to remove her daughter at once. . . . This announcement was heard by her daughter; it excited her, and she was seized with convulsions. She was assisted by Count Pellegrini, one of my patients. The mother, who heard her cries, left me suddenly, tore her daughter violently from the hands of the person who was assisting her, saying: "Unhappy girl, thou also art in the plot with the people of this house!" and in her fury threw her with her head against the wall. All the symptoms of the unfortunate patient again showed themselves. I hastened to her assistance; the mother, still furious, threw herself upon me to prevent my doing so, loading me with abuse. I got her away with the help of certain members of my family and went back to her daughter to render assistance. Whilst I was busy with her I heard fresh screams of rage and repeated efforts to open and shut alternatively the door of the room in which I was. It was M. Paradis, who, on the information of a servant of his wife, had forced his way into my house sword in hand. . . . The madman was disarmed, and left my house after showering imprecations on me and my family. His wife . . . had fainted. I ordered that the help of which she had need should be given to her, and she went away some hours later. But their unhappy daughter was attacked by vomiting, convulsions, and maniacal attacks which the slightest sound, especially that of bells, brought on in aggravated degree. She had even relapsed into her original blindness owing to the violence of the blow caused by her mother, which led me to fear for the state of her brain. . . . It would have been easy for me to prove these excesses in a law court by the testimony of Count Pellegrini, and that of eight persons who were in my house, to say nothing of as many neighbours who were in a position to depose to the truth. But solely occupied with saving Miss Paradis, if it were possible, I neglected all the means to this end which the law offered me. . . . I received, indeed, by M. Ost, physician to the Court, a written order of Dr. von Störck, in his capacity of chief physician, dated Schoenbrunn, May 2nd, 1779, enjoining me to "bring this humbug to an end," and to restore Miss Paradis to her family if I thought this could be done without danger. . . . I replied . . . to this ill-advised order that the patient was not in a condition to be removed without danger to her life. The risk of death to which Miss Paradis was exposed doubtless made an impression on her father. . . .

He made use of the mediation of two persons of repute to induce me to continue to treat his daughter. I sent word to him that this should be on condition that neither he nor his wife should again set foot in my house.

In fact my treatment surpassed my expectations, and nine days were sufficient entirely to calm the convulsions and to cause the disappearance of the other symptoms. But the blindness remained as before. A fortnight's treatment removed it and restored the organ to the state in which it was before the injury. I added a fortnight more of instruction in order to improve and consolidate her health. . . . M. Paradis, assured as to the good condition of his daughter by M. Ost, who at his request and with my consent, followed the progress of the treatment, wrote a letter to my wife in which he thanked her for her motherly care. He also thanked me in a similar way, begging me to accept his excuses in regard to the past, and assuring me of his gratitude in the future. He ended by asking me to send him his daughter that she might breathe the air of the country to which he was betaking himself; that from there he would send her back to me every time I thought it necessary for the continuance of her instruction. . . .

I believed him to be in good faith, and sent him back his daughter on June 8th. The next day I learnt that his family spread about that she was still blind and had convulsions, and presented her as such, forcing her to imitate convulsions and blindness. This statement was at first contradicted by persons who had assured themselves of the contrary, but it was supported by the obscure cabal of which M. Paradis was the tool without its being possible for me to stop its spread by the most trustworthy testimonies.

Mesmer says his opponents took advantage of the precautions which he thought it necessary to prevent her

being excited by visitors, as well as of the clumsiness and incapacity of the girl herself, to impugn the reality of the cure. He insisted that vision was restored, and that it only required to be perfected by practice and perseverance. A significant comment on this may be found in the testimony of an impartial witness. In a passage of Grimm's correspondence it is stated that the girl came to Paris in 1784, and astonished the public by her fine execution on the spinet, notwithstanding the fact that she was absolutely blind!

Mesmer further says that he undertook the treatment of various diseases, among others a case of hemiplegia—the consequence of apoplexy, suppressions, vomiting of blood, frequent colics, a convulsive sleep since childhood, with spitting of blood and chronic ophthalmia, and so forth.

We have thought it well to let Mesmer tell his story in his own way. It will be noted that he is vague, confused, and often self-contradictory in his statements of facts. In all his writings which we have read there is the same apparent inability to discriminate between fact and theory. His style is intolerably prolix and wearisome, and his manner of dealing with the subjects he treats, even when it does not arouse suspicion of his good faith, does not create confidence in his judgement. It would serve no profitable purpose to analyse the cases in detail. It need only be pointed out that they present the characteristic signs of hysteria. Miss Oesterline was evidently a highly neurotic young woman who suffered from menstrual disturbance. Apart from the "animal magnetism" she was treated by a course of iron, and the cure was completed by marriage. There is nothing here that needs to be explained by the operation of any unknown force. It should be added that she had previously refused to have anything more to do with Mesmer. The case of the girl Paradis is an incoherent tale in which it is impossible now to disentangle any stray element of truth from the mass of obvious misrepresentation. Whether this was due to self-delusion or deliberate falsehood need not be discussed.

Propositions.

In the tract from which we have been quoting, Mesmer summed up his doctrine of "animal magnetism" in the following propositions:

1. There is a mutual influence between the heavenly bodies, the earth, and living things.
2. A fluid universally diffused and continuous so as to leave no vacuum, the subtilty of which allows no comparison, and which by its nature is susceptible of receiving propagating and communicating all the impressions of movement, is the medium by which this influence is exercised.
3. This reciprocal action is subject to mechanical laws hitherto unknown.
4. There result from this action alternate effects which may be considered as "flux and reflux."
5. This flux and reflux is more or less general, more or less particular, more or less compound, according to the nature of the causes that determine it.
6. It is by this operation (the most universal of those which nature offers us) that the relations of activity between the heavenly bodies, the earth, and its constituent parts are brought into play.
7. The properties of matter and of the organized body depend on this operation.
8. The animal body feels the alternative effect of this agent, and it is by insinuating itself into the substance of the nerves that it directly affects them.
9. It manifests itself particularly in the human body by properties analogous to those of the magnet. Here can be distinguished two poles equally diverse and opposed which may be communicated, changed, destroyed, and reinforced. Even the phenomenon of declination is observed.
10. The property of the animal body which makes it susceptible of the influence of heavenly bodies, and of the reciprocal action of those that surround it, manifested by its analogy with the magnet, has decided me to call it animal magnetism.
11. The action and the virtue of animal magnetism thus defined may be communicated to other bodies animate and inanimate. Both one and the other are nevertheless more or less susceptible.
12. This action and this virtue may be reinforced and propagated by the same bodies.
13. By experiment one may note the flow of a matter the subtilty of which penetrates all bodies without any notable loss of activity.
14. Its action takes place at a long distance without the aid of any intermediate body.
15. It is augmented and reflected by glasses as light is.
16. It is communicated, propagated, and augmented by sound.



FIG. 4.—MESMER'S "BAQUET."

17. This magnetic virtue may be accumulated, concentrated, and transported.

18. I have said that animated bodies were not equally susceptible; there are even some, though very few, which have a property so antagonistic that their mere presence destroys all the effects of this magnetism in the other bodies.

19. This opposite force also penetrates all bodies. It may equally be communicated, propagated, accumulated, concentrated, and transported, reflected by glasses and propagated by sound, which constitutes not only a privation, but a positively antagonistic activity.

20. The magnet, whether natural or artificial, is, like other bodies, susceptible in regard to animal magnetism, and even in regard to the opposite activity, without in either case its action on iron and the needle suffering any alteration, which proves that the principle of animal magnetism differs essentially from that of the mineral magnetism.

21. This system will throw new light on the nature of fire and light as well as on the theory of attraction, of the flux or reflux, the magnet and electricity.

22. It will show that the artificial magnet and electricity have, with regard to diseases, only properties that are common to several other agents which Nature provides; and that, if it has happened that some useful effects have resulted from these, they are due to animal magnetism.

23. It will be recognized by facts, in accordance with the practical rules which I will establish, that this principle can immediately cure diseases of the nerves and mediately others.

24. That with its help the physician is enlightened as to the use of remedies; that it perfects their action, and provokes and directs salutary crises so as to make it itself master of them.

25. In publishing my method I will show by a new theory of diseases the universal utility of the principle I oppose to them.

26. With this knowledge the physician will be able to form a certain judgement as to the origin, nature, and progress of diseases, even the most complicated; he will check their development and effect a cure without ever exposing the patient to dangerous effects or troublesome sequels, whatever be the age, temperament, or sex. Women even in the state of pregnancy and during confinement will enjoy the same advantage.

27. Finally, this doctrine will place the physician in a position to judge accurately of the degree of health of each individual and to preserve him from the diseases to which he might be exposed. The art of healing will thus reach its supreme perfection.

This is the doctrine of mesmerism formulated by its inventor. The reader will note the ingenuity by which every therapeutic effect of whatever kind is claimed as the effect of "animal magnetism." Mesmer includes even a "maternity benefit" (Proposition 26). The prophecy

contained in the last proposition has not yet been fulfilled. Undismayed by animal magnetism and its numerous and varied progeny, the demon of disease still walks up and down the world seeking whom he may devour. It must be confessed also that the art of healing is far from having reached its supreme perfection.

Mesmer failed, as has been said, to induce the scientific men of Vienna to take him seriously, and the results of his cases, even as told by himself, fully justify their attitude. In 1778 he shook the dust of the Austrian capital off his feet and sought a new sphere of action in Paris. There he first tried to get a hearing from the Academy of Science and the Academy of Medicine; but both these learned bodies required him to treat cases in which the nature of the disease had first been certified by doctors, so that they might be able to judge of the results. Instead of patients Mesmer, like other faith healers, offered testimonials. He therefore turned in disgust from the men of science to the public. Being a man of fine presence with the confidence in himself which engenders confidence in others, he succeeded, probably through the intervention of Marie Antoinette, in entering into negotiations with the Minister, M. de Maurepas. He demanded not that his method should be tested, but that it should be accepted blindly as if it were a kind of revelation. He asked for his reward that a grant should be made him of an estate and a château chosen by himself. The Government seems not to have seen through him, and an income of 20,000 livres with an annual subvention of 10,000 francs for the establishment of a magnetic clinic was actually offered to him in the name of the King, on condition that he should train three persons chosen by the Government in his methods. It was added that if these persons considered his discovery useful greater rewards would be bestowed on him by the Government. Mesmer declined these offers, and went off with some of his patients to Spa. Deslon, a physician who had been initiated into the mysteries of mesmerism by the prophet himself, and who, owing to his association with him, had got into bad odour with the Faculty of Medicine, then sent a memorial to the *Parlement* and started a public clinic of his own. Mesmer forthwith denounced his former ally as an impostor, but was induced by the offer of a large sum subscribed by believers to return. He is said to have received altogether more than 340,000 livres.

Mesmer used all the arts of the showman. His performances were given with every accompaniment that could help in raising the enthusiasm of the devotees to the highest pitch. They stood in rows with hands joined, around a kind of tub (*baquet*) supposed to be charged with animal magnetism; through holes in the lid of the tub projected iron rods, which could be applied to any part of the body. The influence of the imagination, the dim religious light, music, and perfumes, all combined with the personal magnetism of Mesmer himself to spread the contagion of nervous excitement among those present. At the right moment the prophet himself would appear, clad in lilac-coloured silk with a magic wand in his hands. To make his influence more assured, he had disciples whom he could trust and whose faith he liberally rewarded. In this way he is said to have spent 100,000 francs. He stilled any excess of excitement with a wave of his wand; or if the paroxysms were beyond his control, he had them removed to a padded room (*salle des crises*). The whole object of the treatment was to produce a "crisis" which manifested itself in convulsions resembling those seen among the believers at the tomb of the Deacon Paris.¹ The mode of producing these "crises" was, besides the ritual of the magnetic tub already alluded to, the use of magnetized iron rods, touching with the fingers, and magnetic passes. Mesmer magnetized trees, around which believers remained fixed in a kind of trance. The whole thing became a show. Mesmerism naturally appealed to exalted temperaments. Hence, enthusiastic politicians, such as Lafayette and d'Eprémeuil, were found among the devotees of Mesmer. His influence was, however, chiefly manifested in women; the "idle rich" of Paris at that time of upheaval were easily led away by a new sensation. But he did not succeed with all great ladies. Mosso² has unearthed from a book, privately printed, and entitled *Choix des mémoires secrets, pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres* (August 27th, 1784), a curious anecdote. The Princess de Lamballe went to see Mesmer pontificate. He could not refuse a person of such high rank and influence at Court, and accordingly she saw the patients around the mysterious tub, going through all the phases of the treatment. It may be gathered that she was looked upon as a hostile witness, and that her presence was resented especially by the women who probably took it ill that an

intelligent woman should be present at the Eleusian mysteries in which they played a prominent part. The Princess asked Mesmer to magnetize her, but he failed. It was, therefore, spread about among the people that the blood royal resisted magnetism. Alas! her royal blood did not save Madame de Lamballe from the tragic fate which overtook her during the Revolution. One wretch boasted that he had torn her heart out. Fragments of her savagely mangled body were carried about the streets, and were thrust before the eyes of her friend Marie Antoinette in her prison.

In many cases the operator sat in front of the patient fixing his gaze steadily upon her, whilst he gently pressed the abdomen with his hands. If that did not bring about the desired effect, Mesmer sat close to the patient holding her legs and knees between his; he applied his hands to the abdomen, as nearly as possible in the region of the ovary, touching the most sensitive parts, and bringing his eyes closer and closer to her face till their mouths almost touched each other. Mesmer took care to choose as his assistants handsome young men. Naturally abuses arose; many of the women who went to Mesmer did not go to be magnetized. Among many songs of the same purport we need only quote the following:

Que le charlatan
Mesmer,
Avec un autre frater,
Guérisse mainte
femme;
Qu'il en tourne la
cervelle.
En les tâtant ne sait où,
C'est fou,
Très fou,
Et je n'y crois pas
du tout;
Mais je pense qu'il
magnétise
Par la sottise.



FIG. 5.—MAGNETIC SYMPATHY.

(Reproduced from Dr. Eugen Hollander's *Die Karikatur und die Satire in der Medizin*.)

so great that the Government felt it necessary that a scientifically conducted inquiry should be made into the whole subject of "animal magnetism."

The King therefore on March 12th, 1784, appointed a commission of four physicians of the Paris Faculty of Medicine. With them were associated, at their own request, five members of the Académie Royale des Sciences. Their report, which was presented on August 11th, 1784, is a document of the highest importance in the history of medicine, and as its purport has been misrepresented by some writers, and apparently read at second hand by others, we propose to publish the full text in our next issue. Perhaps some of the misunderstanding has arisen from the fact that there were three reports—namely, the one just referred to, a private one presented directly to the King, and a third by the Academy of Medicine.

(To be continued.)

¹ See BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, November 27th, 1909, p. 1549, and December 4th, 1900, p. 1625.

² *Revue Scientifique*, August 26th, 1896.